

The SAFECOM Process

In an effort to coordinate the various related federal initiatives, the SAFECOM program was established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and approved by the President's Management Council (PMC) as a high priority E-Gov initiative. SAFECOM is a communications program within the Command, Control and Interoperability Division that provides research, development, testing and evaluation, guidance, tools, and templates on communications-related issues to local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response agencies working to improve emergency response through more effective and efficient interoperable wireless communications. The Division is managed by the Science and Technology Directorate.

The program is driven by the needs of emergency responders and includes extensive public/private sector involvement and consultation. SAFECOM is pursuing its mission on a variety of fronts and is consistently guided by the input of local and regional emergency response officials. Emergency responders include law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and emergency medical service providers who are the first to arrive at the scene of an emergency. The emergency response community has identified the following as the key issues that hamper emergency response wireless communications today: incompatible and aging communications equipment; limited and fragmented budget cycles and funding; limited and fragmented planning and coordination; limited and fragmented radio spectrum; and limited equipment standards.

In its work, SAFECOM adheres to a bottom-up approach, which means the program relies heavily on local and state emergency response practitioners for input and guidance as it works to define and implement solutions for the interoperability challenge. As a practitioner-driven program, SAFECOM has developed a governance structure that facilitates the input of local and state emergency response practitioners. Through the Program's Executive Committee (EC) and Emergency Response Council (ERC), the emergency response community and local, tribal, state, and Federal policy makers provide strategic input to the SAFECOM Program.

To accelerate the development of critical standards for interoperability, SAFECOM has partnered with many Federal, state and local government agencies and organizations and with the private sector, including standards developing organizations. Federal partners have included" the U.S. Department of Defense; the U.S. Department of Energy; the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; the U.S. Department of Justice; the U.S. Department of the Treasury; the Federal Communications Commission; and the National Telecommunications and Information Association.

SAFECOM has also partnered with a number of state and local government associations, including: the International City/County Management Association; the National Association of Counties; the National Association of State Chief Information Officers; the National Association of State Telecommunications Directors; the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors; the National Conference of State Legislatures; the National Emergency Management Association; the National Governors Association; the National League of Cities; and the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Local, tribal, and state public safety organizations that represent emergency response officials and that have worked with SAFECOM include:

AFCEA International; the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials; the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International, Inc.; the Federal Wireless Users Forum; the International Association of Chiefs of Police; the International Association of Fire Chiefs; the Major Cities Chiefs Association; the Major County Sheriffs' Association; the National Association of State Emergency Medical Service Officials; the National Emergency Number Association; the National Executives Institute Associates; the National Sheriffs Association; the National Volunteer Fire Council; and the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association

Public and private sector standards-related bodies that are working with SAFECOM to promote interoperable communications technology include: the Capital Wireless Integrated Network (CapWIN); Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers; the International Telecommunication Union; the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) Technology Programs; the National Institute of Standards and Technology; Project 25; the Project Mobility for Emergency and Safety Applications (MESA); and the Telecommunications Industry Association. In addition, SAFECOM has sought the advice and input from industry.

The SAFECOM Executive Committee, which serves as the primary steering group for the SAFECOM program, is comprised of representatives from local and state emergency response agencies and professional associations, as well as contributing Federal agencies. Montgomery County Maryland Councilmember Marilyn Praisner, National Association of Counties (NACo), serves as EC Chair, and Mr. Glen Nash, State of California, Department of General Services, Telecommunications Division, serves as Vice Chair. Representatives from the following organizations also serve on the EC:

- Association of Public Safety Communications Officials - International, Inc. (APCO)
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Chief Information Officer (CIO)
- Department of Justice (DOJ) Chief Information Officer (CIO)
- International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)
- International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC)
- Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCC)
- Major County Sheriffs' Association (MCSA)
- National Association of Counties (NACo)
- National Association of State EMS Directors (NASEMSD)
- National Governors Association (NGA)
- National Institute of Justice Communications Technologies (CommTech)
- National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)
- National League of Cities (NLC)
- National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC)
- National Sheriffs' Association (NSA)
- Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
- US Conference of Mayors (USCM)
- Executive Committee Contact Information >>

There is also an Emergency Response Council (ERC) that provides a mechanism for individuals with specialized skills and common interests to share best practices and lessons learned so that interested parties at all levels of government can learn from one another's experience, perspective, and expertise. Its membership, which comprises representatives from the local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response and policy maker communities, is a key resource for the improvement of emergency response communications interoperability. Representatives from the following organizations serve on the ERC:

- American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO)
- American Public Transportation Association (APTA)
- Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS)
- Capital Wireless Integrated Network (CapWIN)
- Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)
- Council of State Governments (CSG)
- Department of Agriculture (DoA)
- Department of Commerce (DoC)
- Department of Defense (DoD)
- Department of Energy (DoE)
- Department of Interior (DoI)
- Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications (FPIC)
- InterAgency Board (IAB)
- International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)
- International City/County Management Association (ICMA)
- International Municipal Signal Association (IMSA)
- Joint Tactical Radio System (JTRS)
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
- National Association of Regional Councils (NARC)
- National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO)
- National Association of State Telecommunications Directors (NASTD)
- National Association of State EMS Directors (NASEMSD)
- National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA)
- National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA)
- National Emergency Management Association (NEMA)
- National Emergency Number Association (NENA)
- National Guard Bureau (NGB)
- National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)
- National Native American Law Enforcement Association (NNALEA)
- National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC)
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)
- Office of Domestic Preparedness (ODP)

- Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
- SEARCH
- Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA)
- USDA Forest Service

The SAFECOM program recognizes that the functional and technical requirements for public safety communications equipment vary across jurisdictions and disciplines and are determined at the local level. It also recognizes that public safety communications will continue to operate on a variety of technologies across fragmented spectrum bands. As a result, SAFECOM does not expect to promote a single solution to public safety interoperability across the nation.

SAFECOM supports and promotes a broad range of solutions with the following key elements:

- Technical and functional requirements should be defined at the local or tribal level up to the state and then to the Federal level;
- Solutions should involve a “system of systems” approach that incorporates existing technologies and allows for the development of new technologies and functionality in the future;
- And standards should be open to allow the interoperability of equipment from a variety of technologies and vendors.

Initiatives under the SAFECOM program include:

- [RapidCom](#) -- a program designed to ensure that a minimum level of emergency response interoperability would be in place in ten high-threat urban areas by September 30, 2004. With the initial work of RapidCom now complete, incident commanders in each of the urban areas now have the ability to adequately communicate with each other and their respective command centers within one hour of an incident. With the input of local emergency response officials, RapidCom identified and advanced five “critical success factors” essential to interoperable systems as represented in the Interoperability Continuum.
- [Statewide Communications Interoperability Planning \(SCIP\) Methodology](#) -- a strategic plan for improving statewide interoperable communications developed by SAFECOM in partnership with the Commonwealth of Virginia and support from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). The SCIP Methodology provides for the integration of practitioner input into a successful statewide strategic plan. The SCIP Methodology serves as one approach for states to consider as they initiate statewide communications planning efforts.
- Statement of Requirements (SoR) -- is a tool for public safety communications interoperability, released in April 2004, that defines future requirements for crucial voice and data communications in day-to-day, task force, and mutual aid operations. NIJ’s CommTech Program (formerly AGILE) partnered with SAFECOM in formulating and releasing the requirements. With the SoR, the nation’s 60,000 emergency response agencies – for the first time – have a document that serves as a first step toward establishing base-level communications and interoperability standards for all emergency response agencies. The SoR helps the emergency response community convey a shared and vetted vision that ultimately will help private industry better align research and development efforts with critical interoperable communication needs.

Project 25 (P25) defines a suite of standards for a digital wireless radio communications system to be used by the emergency response community. To allow multiple vendors to supply the products and services to the communications system users, the Project 25 system has eight interfaces for which standards are or will be developed. Each interface allows the products of one manufacturer to interoperate with products of other manufacturers by defining the signaling and messages that cross the interface. For example, an agency could purchase P25 portable radios from one or more vendors, mobile radios from other vendors, the base stations from others, and dispatch consoles from still other vendors; all would have the features the agency needs to accomplish its mission, and all would interoperate under the P25 standards. The FY 2007 SAFECOM Recommended Federal Grant Guidance states that grant applicants using funds to purchase P25 equipment must obtain certain documented evidence from the manufacturer to show that the equipment has been tested to, and has passed, all of the applicable, published, and normative P25 compliance assessment test procedures for performance, conformance, and interoperability. A list of these standards and procedures are available at: <http://www.safecomprogram.gov/NR/rdonlyres/F40FA131-4193-4F85-856C-B735A1547168/0/GRANTGUIDANCEPROJECT25EXPLANATORYADDENDA2.pdf> NIST has been funded by DHS to be SAFECOM's technical representative in the various standards processes - especially P25. NIST's attendance has been designed to ensure that both DHS's interests and the interests of the public safety community are adequately represented.

In addition, the SAFECOM website <<http://www.safecomprogram.gov>> provides members of the emergency response community and other constituents with information, tools, and resources to help them meet their communications and interoperability needs, including standards-related information. It offers comprehensive information on topics relevant to emergency response communications and features best practices that have evolved from real-world situations.